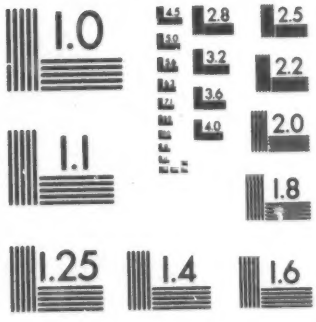

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DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 961 EA 017 629

AUTHOR Irwin, Kathleen
TITLE Schools at the Center of Society's Values and Vision.
PUB DATE 2 Apr 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Education; Democracy; *Democratic Values; Educational Change; *Educational Experiments; Educational Improvement; Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; Educational Principles; Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; *Foundations of Education; Human Dignity; Individualism; Individual Power; Participative Decision Making; *School Community Relationship; Social Action; *Social Change
IDENTIFIERS *Arthurdale Community School WV; Clapp (Elsie Ripley); Dewey (John); *Roger Clark Ballard Memorial School KY

ABSTRACT

The critical need for school reform cannot be separated from social reform. It is necessary, therefore, to go beyond the limited scope of curriculum modification to the process of learning how to take every element of an educational experience, raise it to a conscious level, and relate it to a universal struggle around a system of democratic values. The Depression-era community education experiments of Elsie Ripley Clapp provide an example of such an attempt. Clapp organized two projects aimed at demonstrating the place of education in the building of a democratic life--Roger Clark Ballard Memorial School and Arthurdale Community School. Both curricula operated from basic assumptions that represented the organized expression of Clapp's understanding of what John Dewey meant by the "social functioning of schools," "democracy as a way of life," and "creative democracy." The projects operated on the following three assumptions: (1) a democratic philosophy of life must dominate all the activities constituting the curriculum and other phases of the school program; (2) democracy and freedom result from one's own initiative and resourcefulness; and (3) individual differences must be respected. Twelve references are provided. (DCS)

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SCHOOLS AT THE CENTER OF SOCIETY'S VALUES AND VISION

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AERA Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
April 2, 1985

EA 017 629

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> 'Well, I happened to be sitting beside Guy Tugwell and he asked, 'How many are there on this Project?' And I felt like saying, you haven't done your homework have you? Then I thought, he doesn't want to do his homework. He doesn't want this thing to happen.
>
> I said, there are 1,200. He said, 'Did you say 1,200? Oh, that is too bad.' But I don't understand, I replied. There are 1,200 lovely people down there. 'Well,' he said, 'anybody would know that you can't have a community with under 10,000.'
>
> I was speechless for a moment. But damnit, they are down there! They are a community. He said, 'No, no it won't work.' And that really was the beginning of the end, right then. [1]

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey believed that ideally, all education within a democratic society looks to the same standard for its measure of purpose, coherency and vitality. This standard is the interplay of beliefs and behaviors which equate the freedom of an individual with a liberated intelligence, a shared way of life and the creation of a set of communicated common interests. Roughly translated, this standard suggests that despite the impact of modern industrial society and technology on all social forms, people continue to give one another their possibilities in a series of face-to-face encounters which demand the absence of isolation and separation and signal the presence of something known as community.

Such ideas, to the extent that they are capable of building and sustaining a socially-integrated society, are more relevant today than

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ever before. American educators know full well that the deepening divisions of race, class, gender and unequal economic opportunity, left unresolved, can't help but spell disaster for our system of public schooling. If the critical need for school reform cannot be separated from social reform, as Dewey believed, then we must draw our direction from efforts that go beyond the limited scope of curriculum modification or an amalgam of pedagogical novelties.

For the last few years, my interest has been in learning how we can take every element of an educational experience, raise it to a conscious level and relate it to a universal struggle around a system of democratic values.

Now, where do we find such teaching adventures and of them, what can we excise that will stand in direct challenge to all schools have claimed, and continue to claim, that they cannot become?

One dimension of my inquiry is an on-going examination of two Depression-era experiments in community education pioneered by Dr. Elsie Ripley Clapp.

After ten years in public and private schools, and six years assisting John Dewey at Columbia University, Clapp organized two projects aimed at demonstrating the place of education in the building of a democratic life. The first was her creation of the Roger Clark Ballard Memorial School in Jefferson County, Kentucky (1929-1934). The second was her development under the sponsorship of the Roosevelt Administration and federal Resettlement legislation, of the Arthurdale Community School in Arthurdale, West Virginia (1934-1936).

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Both curricula operated from a set of basic assumptions which were tested, realized, expanded and permitted to penetrate the accustomed ways of thought and action as they were applied to the terms of policy and program within each of the schools and their communities.

Since these ideas represented the organized expression of Clapp's understanding of what Dewey meant by the "Social Functioning of Schools," "Democracy As a Way of Life," or "Creative Democracy," I will present them and then indicate briefly their translation into practice.

PREPARING PEOPLE TO DEAL WITH THEIR WORLD

The first assumption was that the character and success of <u>any</u> school depends upon the philosophy of life which is to dominate <u>all</u> the activities constituting the curriculum and other phases of the school program, including pre-school and adult education. Within a democracy, this means that the fundamental doctrine must be an acceptance that education is a directed process of preparing people to deal with their world - economically, politically, socially. In other words, people learn what they experience not simply what they are told. If, as in Ballard and Arthurdale, there was a rhetorical commitment to democratic procedures within administrative and instructional activities, then these had to predominate.

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An interview with a Ballard staff member (later to become one of the originators of the Goddard College teacher education program) revealed the following about the character and content of staff meetings.

> 'Within the format of staff meetings, Dr. Clapp taught two courses for credit. They were the most freewheeling courses I've ever attended but that was probably a good thing. Here is where we read through and discussed Dewey's Democracy and Education and Experience and Education.
>
> As Director, Clapp functioned more as a consultant to teachers. We had plenty of problems. I had lots of discipline problems but Dr. Clapp would simply circulate and encourage us to 'think about this,' 'try this,' or 'read this.' At any rate, you were expected to get the idea, do it your way, but you had to do it.
>
> You grew to focus on ideas and on the Project Method which was underway, rather than on who was always cutting up in class. What we did at Ballard was to become my philosophy of teaching at Goddard. That is, teachers must arrive at a creative belief in self. A teacher is a creative agent. A school or an administration must teach and support that first. You are after concepts, not just computation or quantification."[2]

While Ballard was a rural school in the established Louisville horse farm country where for twenty years the children of the owners of estates, business and professional men; the farmers, dairy owners, gardeners, mechanics, farm tenants, truckmen and handy men had all gone to school together, Arthurdale was another story entirely.

This first New Deal subsistence farm project grew up in the midst of a twelve mile long stretch of impoverished coal camps known as Scotts Run. Families continued to live in company "houses" where water

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and light had been shut off since the mines had closed. Drainage from outdoor toilets had settled into the water supply and typhoid outbreaks resulted. Miners who came to live on the Arthurdale homestead had been unemployed anywhere from three to seven years. The American Friends Service Committee reported that,

> "As the months of the feeding program passed... and the workers learned to know the distressing living conditions of so many people, it became more and more apparent that it was not enough to try and fill only the physical needs of those they were trying to help. The months of lack of proper food had caused a mental lethargy which all workers felt must be combated. To arouse a desire to better their own conditions seemed a task almost as gigantic as the problem of providing food and medical care."[3]

It was in full view of these factors that confidence in the ability of an enlightened people to govern themselves, to conduct and prescribe the course of their lives and those of their children had to be stimulated and sustained.

In Arthurdale, preparing people to deal with their world was itself a growing idea, described by Clapp as "born in the interaction of thinking and doing, shaped in part by events."

Those events included : the establishment of a farm cooperative, a community health center, a weekly program of square dances, a summer athletic program, school gardens and school lunches which were staffed by volunteer parents, a community fire committee, a community newspaper issued by high school students with adults participating in the writing of news articles, mountain music festivals, trade classes and tradtitional crafts classes.

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Throughout all of these, as John Dewey pointed out in his Foreward to Clapp's book, Community Schools In Action, teachers furthered the education of the community not by surveying it but by belonging to it.

> "It was not just a question of staying 'after school' -- which is a part of the duties of many teachers. There were literally hardly any hours of night or day that would be said to be after school work -- that is, educative work -- was finished."[4]

Teachers participated as fellow workers, as community citizens, as homestead members (true also at Ballard) but more importantly, they participated in a particular explanation of democracy as advanced by Dewey which reasons that,

> "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the numbers of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. They secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests."[5]

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THE INTERPENETRATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

A liberation of powers was what Clapp and her staff were intent upon. A second assumption was that schools should emphasize the fact that democracy and freedom always result in challenges to self-realization. Real progress with any people results from their own initiative and resourcefulness. It cannot be achieved through some agent of external authority.

This idea required a belief in a process of learning through which a student could become the teacher and the teacher a learner or as Clapp would later reflect, "Never before, I think, had the teachers or I had to learn as much in as short a time. The most important, perhaps, of all the things we learned was to take as well as give, to listen as well as tell, to be willing and able to have things done as we never planned they should be and finally to get the point from each experience and use it in the one that follows.

John Dewey offered something very similar to Clapp's observation when in 1929 he wrote,

> "Individuality is inexpugnable because it is a manner of distinctive sensitivity, selection, choice, response and utilization of conditions. For this reason, if for no other, it is impossible to develop integrated individuality by any all-embracing system or program. No individual can make the determination for anyone else; nor can he make it for himself all at once and forever."[6]

At both Ballard and Arthurdale, the process of learning and teaching was one in which student and teacher animated one another. Each recognized and provoked in the other the learning and the teaching.

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Perfection was not the goal. People were in the process of becoming and that can never be a perfect process.

> "Mistakes are no longer either mere unavoidable accidents to be mourned or moral sins to be expiated and forgiven. They are lessons in wrong methods of using inteiligence and instructions as to a better course in the future. They are indications of the need of revision, development, readjustment. Ends grow, standards of judgment are improved."[7]

Staff decisions made at Ballard continually offered the opportunity for improvement in the standards of judgment. Despite the fact that Ballard was an economically diverse community, it was by no means the Great Community. Social stratification existed which fragmented people and de-sensitized them to the plight of their "neighbors".

When Clapp and her teachers attempted to institute a hot noonday meal designed especially to benefit the malnourished children from poorer homes, the well-to-do parents balked. It had been their custom to serve their largest meal in the evening and they did not want that practice disturbed. These same parents (mothers) had previously been responsible for the lunch program, abbreviated as it was, and felt slighted at not being included in any of the discussions of or planning for the new menu.

Clapp saw this latter complaint as legitimate and attempted to right it only to turn around and commit another error in method by not bothering to consult any of the parents when setting the cost for the meals. A price was established which went far beyond the financial capacity of the very people the program was intended to nourish and Dr. Clapp had a fresh wave of protests on her hands.

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As a direct result of this experience, Clapp's "better course" was to work with and through people,

> "as we should have known, starting where they were, using what they knew, and sharing work and responsibilities with them. Pondering on the work that the mothers wanted, and did not want, to do about school lunches, we decided that as educators we should be able to analyze other enterprises in which we and the parents had common interest and discover which portions of these they might wish to undertake."[8]

At Arthurdale, the challenges to self-realization or the process of becoming took even more serious turns. The project itself quickly became a political "hot potatoe". The federal government proceeded at a breakneck speed, purchasing land and moving in miners-turned-construction crews all within the space of three months. Prefabricated homes arrived unsuited to the foundations that the miners had laid. Costs surpassed initial estimates and New Deal bureaucracy eclipsed family participation in the planning of the community. The press had a field day.

Some reports were congratulatory, others skeptical but many were pure sensationalism. Teaching staff and residents were accused of communism, socialism, welfarism or as one faculty member put it, "every kind of ism." The Music and Drama teacher remembered it this way.

> "I was the one who kept one eye out down the road from Reedsville to Arthurdale for suspicious-looking cars coming up the road and I would, if I possibly could, even if I had to leave a class... get out there and be there, at the Center, when they got out of the cars. They were the most utterly ruthless lot, these Washington reporters. They were looking for dirt. That's what they wanted. If I had done really well, I would have turned them around and headed them out. Sometimes it took two or three hours to get to that point."[9]

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Even here the interpenetration of learning and teaching prevailed when the homesteaders, in reaction to all press conflicts, approached this same teacher who was responsible for theater productions and suggested staging a satire on themselves.

> "The homesteaders had had their fingers burned by some of these reporters, notably by one pair who impersonated Federal officials of the newly created Resettlement Administration and got the homesteaders to tell all their troubles so that they, the bogus officials, could set things right. Out of such incidents the adult drama group built a comedy which castigated reporters and homesteaders alike. In this play the adults truly created their own vehicle of expression. The language was immensely racy and witty, being the free product of the actors' imaginations placed in an essentially humorous situation. The School felt that a community which could laugh at itself was a healthy community. The homesteaders did not worry about newspaper reporters after that."[10]

A RICHNESS OF DIFFERENCE

A third and final assumption was that within a democracy it is necessary that citizenship present considerable variation in emotional, intellectual and personality traits. Schools then, must aim to conserve such individuality in their students and must strive not just to tolerate these individual differences but to genuinely appreciate the richness and vibrancy they can lend to community life.

Emphasis was on the development of a sense of positive identity within the class, race (not a factor by design at Arthurdale) and nationality groups among students. The teachers believed that all

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cultures represented, be they majority, minority or working class were themselves a wealth of resources which should be used to make positive contributions to the growth and enrichment of every other individual member.

Rather than ignore all but familiar manifestations of a dominant, white middle class culture (the background of Clapp and her teachers) or engage in stereotyping or denigrating the image of the Appalachian man or woman, Clapp made the essence of those cultures the core of the curriculum.

The Ballard Schools's studies of Kentucky received antiques, rare library volumes, and letters and journals of early travelers in the region from the estate families. Country families contributed calf, squirrel, possum skins and gourds which they used as dippers and containers.

In many respects, old ways of living prevailed in all homes regardless of income or privilege and those traditional ways of doing things were invited and respected within the life of the school.

> "And in the cabins and the little houses in which nearly two thirds of our school families lived, (...) the people continued to till the soil, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, with a hand-made wooden spade, plow, and rake, using a 'boughten' hoe only. (...) Cooking was done over the open fire, or on a stove of ancient vintage, and for meat and fish they relied on a gun or a baited string. (...) - they followed the customs of their pioneer ancestors, as they did also in their enjoyments: gathering for talk and song with a mouth-harp and a guitar, and with a fiddler and a 'Caller' for square dances."[11]

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Graduates of the Clapp-directed Arthurdale School describe the planning for and promotion of a valuing of the richness of differences in terms of the variety of educational opportunities the school afforded them.

A member of the first high school class:

> " I remember the education going way beyond the three R's. It was the best opportunity that kids were ever given. There was music and art. We printed a school newspaper. There were photography classes. We developed the school library. We had plays, class programs. Girls and bosy were together in shop classes. I came to the Project when I was thirteen years old and I will always think of it as a wonderful atmosphere to have lived in." 12

Glenna Williams, another Arthurdale School student summarized the experience this way.

> "The school was a beautiful idea. It began with nursery school for two-year olds and went straight through high school. We learned to weave and plan meals. The first year I took electric shop and we made radios and telegraph sets and sent messages back and forth between buildings. We even made a telephone.
>
> In science class we made a surveyor and in math we surveyed where Route 92 is now. In English class we wrote plays, and made the costumes in home economics. The students built an amphitheater.
>
> The entire community turned out for student performances, as well as for the square dances and music festivals organized by Clapp. Originally held in the community center, these activities shifted to the school, which became the hub of community life.

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Our education was much richer than that concentrating on reading, writing, and arithmetic. We did learn those things too. The children learned to read and write about things affecting them. Where else were boys taught home economics in the 1930's?"[13]

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Notes

1. Unpublished Interview, Fletcher Collins, Arthurdale School, 1980.

2. Unpublished Interview, George Beecher, Ballard School, 1984.

3. Introduction to Report and History of Service and Special Projects of Monongalia County Relief Administration for Year Ending April 1, 1935 (mimeographed report).

4. John Dewey, Foreward, Community Schools in Action. (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), p. ix.

5. John Dewey, Democracy and Education. (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 87.

6. John Dewey, Individualism Old and New. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1929), p. 167.

7. John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy. (New York: The American Library, 1920), p. 175.

8. Elsie Ripley Clapp, The Use of Resources in Education. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 93.

9. Unpublished Interview, Fletcher Collins, Arthurdale School, 1980.

10. Fletcher Collins, "Cultural Resources And Opportunities", E.R. Clapp, Community Schools in Action. (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), pp 267 -268

11. Elsie Ripley Clapp, The Use of Resources in Education. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 36.

12. Unpublished Interview, Jettie Boggs Eble, Arthurdale School, 1980.

13. Kathleen Cullinan and Beth Spence, "The New Deal Comes to Preston County," Goldenseal, Volume 7, No.2, p.19.

14. Assumptions drawn from "Plan For The School AT Arthurdale," Community Schools in Action. (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), pp 72 - 73.

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